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ABSTRACT

Because of the rapid increase of technological and general knowledge, the maintenance and development of teaching staffs has become a major problem, especially for the small school district. Cooperative programs uniting several school districts, such as the school study councils utilized in Texas, seem to present the most favorable solution. Advantages include: provisions for a comprehensive program, even distribution of resource allocations, and interaction of district staffs which may facilitate staff development and involvement. (DK)

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COOPERATIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

--- A Possible Approach for Small Schools [1967]



Of the many responsibilities of the effective school administrator none is more important than that of providing a continuous program of staff development. The current demands which society is placing upon the schools require such a program. The rapid and continuous changes in materials and procedures, as well as emerging knowledge concerning the learning characteristics of children, necessitate growth and change in the capabilities and qualities of the school staff. Improvement in learning depends upon improvement in those who are administering and implementing the learning process.

Providing an effective program of staff development is a problem for all administrators. The problem is most acute, however, for the administrator in the small school where, in many cases, there are inadequate supervisory personnel to implement a program of staff development or where the school does not have sufficient financial resources to underwrite such a program. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to present two possible approaches which small schools may find helpful in providing staff development opportunities. Both of these approaches involve cooperative endeavors by two or more school districts.

The first approach is concerned with the common needs of staff development of two or more neighboring school districts. When common needs are discovered, the districts may combine their resources and staffs for a more effective program than either district can provide alone. Such a program can include many topics with wide areas of application such as theories of learning, or it may include very specific topics such as the teaching of reading. In either case the combined resources of two or more districts will strengthen the program.

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A cooperative program may be initiated by the administration of a district by contacting neighboring schools to see if common needs exist. If a program is found to be needed, the administrations involved must work out the financial relationship and decide what resources will be placed in the program. Then joint committees of teachers and administrators from the participating schools should plan the details of the program. In order to be effective, the program must have a sound base of planning. Therefore, the initial contact by an administration should be several months prior to the actual beginning of the program.

One person should be assigned the responsibility of coordinating the program. This person may be a member of the staff of one of the participating schools, or he may be an employed consultant from a college, university, or another school district. The use of an outside consultant is recommended if adequate financial conditions exist. The advantage of a consultant is that he can bring into the program ideas and resources which may not be available in the participating districts.

This type of cooperative endeavor in staff development permits the development of a sound program close enough to home to be practical for the participants.

The second approach is similar to the first except that a larger number of school districts are involved and the cooperative organization is more structured. This approach is currently in use in many areas of Texas. The organizations are known as school study councils. Although the individual study councils in Texas have different functions depending upon the needs of the region which they serve, the emphasis here concerns those councils whose primary purpose is staff development.

A study council is usually created by an existing educational organization such as a county or regional association of school administrators. In most cases, there is a cooperative arrangement which includes a college or university

in the area to be served. In some cases, the college or university contributes the services of a staff member who serves as director of the council. Membership in the council is open, but optional, to all public schools in the area. Member schools are assessed dues on the basis of average daily attendance.

The strength of the study council is in the ability to provide a variety of conferences and workshops for member schools. By having a larger number of schools participating, the council is able to provide expert consultants in many learning areas. Thus, the program of staff development in the area has a much wider base.

The basic limitation of the study council is its inability, except in certain cases, to provide staff development activities which apply to specific schools or districts. By its nature, the study council must provide for the development of knowledge and concepts which generally have a wider application than the specifics for an individual school. Therefore, it is up to each participating school to make application of these concepts and knowledge to its own local needs. Thus, an effective staff development program built around the study council approach must include local study and analysis of new ideas and knowledge which are presented or developed by the study council activities. Combined together, the study council and local activities can prove to be a very effective program.

Cooperative programs such as these have several advantages for the small school. They are:

1. By combining staffs and resources the participating districts can provide a more comprehensive program.
2. The combined resources of the districts will permit acquisition of more consultant services.

3. Interaction among staff members from other districts provides for the exchange of many ideas and suggestions. Participants generally will receive a broader perspective concerning their problems when they have opportunities to interact with other persons who have similar or related problems.

4. Cooperative programs can be economically feasible in learning areas in which a single district may have too few staff members to provide a staff development program of its own.

5. In many cases, staff members are more willing to participate in staff development activities when they know that staff members from neighboring schools are participating also.

Cooperative effort which is the central theme of these approaches may appear out of place in staff development; however, such cooperation is not new. Area vocational schools, cooperative counselors and supervisors, and cooperative special education programs have been functioning successfully. Cooperative staff development may represent an additional step forward in meeting the needs of youth.

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